



# AETC Bases News Clips LAUGHLIN AFB, TX



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## Train-blocked railroad crossings vex Del Rioans and visitors

*Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.*

--- Will Rogers

**BILL SONTAG**  
STAFF WRITER

A string of sedans and SUVs filled with Del Rio civic leaders and Congressman Henry Bonilla were stopped in their tracks Tuesday as the entourage pushed toward a rendezvous with military brass at Laughlin Air Force Base to formally open the base's new Visitor Quarters.

A Union Pacific freight train rolled across the steel rails that intersect the Air Force installation's main gate. There, at 2:50 p.m., according to Security Forces personnel at the entrance kiosk, the train halted, without moving, for 35 minutes. All ingress and egress to the base at that location was sealed off.

**See TRAIN, P. 3A**



News-Herald photo by Bill Sontag

A fast freight roars across the Laughlin Air Force Base main gate access road Thursday afternoon. Security Forces personnel at the gate declare that many Union Pacific trains cross the busy road, and some stop for unknown reasons. One unidentified officer expressed concern that, while signalized, the crossing has no crossarms that might create a more visible barrier during train traffic.

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When Bonilla was finally escorted through the alternative west gate at 3:20 p.m., LAFB personnel muttered and exclaimed, "Oh, this happens all the time!"

According to Texas law and Union Pacific Railroad company policy, it should not. As Bonilla finally approached 47th Flying Training Wing headquarters, the UP freight still blocked the main entrance. The incident was mentioned in a News-Herald article Wednesday, and that day G.R. Davidson, Union Pacific superintendent, issued "Superintendent Bulletin #134, effective Feb. 18, 2003." Addressed to all train crews in the Del Rio subdivision of his district, Davidson's mandate was succinct: "Do not block Laughlin Air Force Base crossing at MP 372.1 under any circumstances unless it is an emergency."

Texas state statute prohibits lengthy blockages of traffic crossings, too. The Federal Railroad Administration has a Web site that "will show you just about every regulation about railroads you'd ever want to see," declared a UP engineer who asked to remain anonymous. The site, [www.fra.dot.gov](http://www.fra.dot.gov) includes all state laws that pertain to blocked crossings.

For Texas, the site explains: "Texas law prohibits a blocked crossing for more than five minutes. The law applies only to a stopped train and is addressed to any officer, agent, servant or receiver of a railroad corporation. Local ordinances may allow passenger trains to stand for the purpose of receiving or discharging passengers, mail, express, or freight for a longer period than five minutes." Transgressions, however, are not heavily punished, if enforced at all: "Violators are guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not less than five nor more than one

hundred dollars."

Of course, track emergencies would exempt train officials from culpability, but the nameless engineer explained that other events may stop a train. Vandals are known to tamper with braking systems along the length of a train. Also, he stated his understanding that the U.S. Border Patrol has recently acquired wide latitude, thanks to "Homeland Security," to stop and search trains. The source declared that he's been stopped several times, sometimes for hours, while agents examined his entire train looking for illegal aliens.

In fact, the Border Patrol has had such authority for at least 18 years. Dennis Smith, public affairs officer for the Del Rio Sector, cited the agency's handbook Friday morning: "Regarding authority to board and inspect conveyances, Section 287 of the Immigration and Nationality Act provides that 'any officer...of the service...shall have the power without warrant...within a reasonable distance from any external boundary of the United States, to board and search for aliens any vessel within the territorial waters of the United States and any railway car, aircraft, conveyance, or vehicles.'"

Regarding the LAFB main gate blockage Tuesday, Smith asserted, "Our agents did not stop that train, and if our agents feel that it's necessary to search a train, they'll do it on a siding off the main track where it doesn't block a roadway." U.P. officials could not be reached as of press time to provide an explanation for the Tuesday blockage at LAFB.

The Union Pacific has measures in place to diminish the frequency of blocked crossings in town. Trains longer than 5,000 feet are not permitted in Del Rio. That, according to the unidentified

source, is the distance between the tracks crossing South Main Street and the South Bedell Avenue crossing. The limitation on length is designed to prevent both crossings from ever being blocked by a train, moving or stationary.

Nevertheless, the company is attentive to citizen concerns. Complaints may be lodged with the Union Pacific Railroad by dialing 1-800-848-8715. Select option four on the audible menu to report blocked crossings. Additional information is available on the U.P. Website, [www.uprr.com](http://www.uprr.com).

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News-Herald photo by BT Sontag

Traffic from LAFB shift change Tuesday afternoon lines up for the passage of a Union Pacific freight train. This train was short and the wait, brief. Occasionally, a stopped train discourages those waiting, and drivers attempt to turn around toward egress through the base's west gate.

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# AETC Bases News Clips

## LUKE AFB, AZ



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### National security issue

Franks, in a strongly worded letter dated Friday, is urging Pinal County officials to decline developer **George Johnson's** request to rezone La Osa Ranch from rural to residential.

To do so, writes Franks, would be "in the interest of national security and crucial flight operations carried out by F-16 pilots at Luke Air Force Base." The Pinal County Planning and Zoning Commission is considering the request.

"I strongly believe a rezoning decision would create an incompatible land use and reduce eastern access to the Barry M. Goldwater Range," Franks wrote to county planning and development Director **David Kuhl**.

"This could jeopardize the entire mission and future of Luke," Franks added.

Along with costing Luke Air Force Base flight paths over the range, critics say the La Osa Ranch project, a 20,000-acre master-planned community south of Eloy, also would jeopardize the future of a critical attack helicopter training base at the nearby Silverbell Army Heliport.

Wrote Franks in his letter: "It is important that all Arizonans work together to secure the future of Luke as a crucial part of our nation's arsenal of freedom."

"I strongly urge the commission to provide forward-thinking objectivity and analysis, which will prove to preserve and enhance our vital national security," he said.

A copy of the letter also was sent to Gov. **Janet Napolitano**.

*The Arizona Republic*

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# HQ AETC News Clips

## Randolph AFB TX



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### Newslines The Air Force

## Star recruiter arrested in alleged murder-for-hire

### Another airman's estranged wife charged with conspiracy in case

By Rod Hafemeister  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

**SAN ANTONIO** — One of the Air Force's top recruiters has been implicated in an alleged murder-for-hire scheme in which the wife of another recruiter is charged with trying to hire a hit man to kill her husband.

Tech. Sgt. Rodney E. Wells was the top producer of Air Force recruits in 2000 and 2001 and repeatedly has been recognized as one of the best Air Force recruiters.

But Wells was arrested a few days before Valentine's Day and remains in the Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, brig while the Air Force investigates his role in the alleged murder plan.

On Feb. 13, San Antonio police arrested Clairese Marie Sickles, 22, on a charge of conspiracy to commit the murder of her estranged husband, Staff Sgt. Daniel M. Sickles.

Both Sickles and Wells are recruiters assigned to the 341st Recruiting Squadron, based in San Antonio.

According to an arrest affidavit, Clairese Sickles approached another man, not identified in the affidavit, about hiring a hit man to kill her husband and offered to give the first man and the killer \$50,000 each from insurance money.

The person contacted for the murder was a police informant,

who contacted military investigators. Police then recorded three telephone conversations the informant had with Clairese Sickles discussing the murder, the affidavit says.

After being contacted by Air Force Times, Lackland Air Force Base officials confirmed that the unnamed man in the affidavit was Wells and that he had been taken into custody a few days before Clairese Sickles was arrested.

"He's been implicated in a crime, he's been apprehended and he's in pretrial confinement," said 2nd Lt. Elaine Larson, a spokeswoman for Lackland's 37th Training Wing. "The investigation is still open, so there haven't been any charges preferred."

According to the arrest affidavit and media reports, Clairese Sickles and her husband were on the verge of a divorce, and she wanted him dead so she could collect his Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance before a divorce took place.

The man now identified as Wells initially contacted the informant and offered him the deal. After Wells met with the man at a bar, the informant contacted the Office of Special Investigations, the arrest affidavit says.

The document also states that Clairese Sickles told the infor-

mant, in one of the recorded conversations, that she wanted her husband to "disappear" and didn't care if the killer used a knife or a gun, but didn't want her husband killed in front of their son.

While Wells remains in confinement, Clairese Sickles was released the day after her arrest after posting \$50,000 bond. Neither she nor Daniel M. Sickles could be reached for comment by press time.

Once the Office of Special Investigations completes its probe, the legal office will determine what, if any, charges Wells will face.

According to the Manual for Courts-Martial, conviction of a conspiracy is punishable by a penalty up to that of the object of the conspiracy — in this case, murder — except the punishment may not include the death penalty.

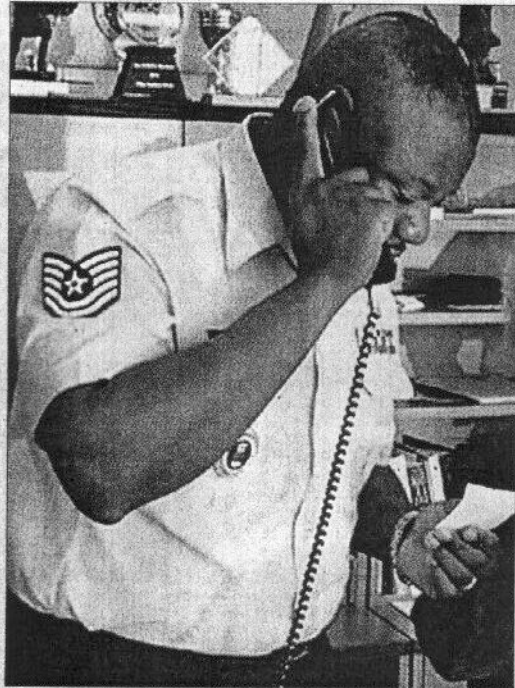
In a murder case, a conspiracy conviction could mean a dishonorable discharge and up to life in prison.

Wells has one of the highest profiles of any Air Force recruiter.

He holds the record for the highest number of recruits in a year, 137 in 2001, as well as third place, for 133 in 2000.

He was a Gold Medal winner for exceeding 80 recruits a year in 1999, 2000 and 2001 and a two-time member of the Century Club for recruiting 100 or more recruits in a year.

He was a Blue Suit winner in 2000 and 2001 for being one of the



Tech. Sgt. Rodney E. Wells was one of the Air Force's top recruiters when this photo was taken. Now he is implicated in a murder-for-hire scheme and being detained at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

top 10 recruiters in the Air Force.

At the 2002 Air Force Sergeants Association convention, Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Gerald Murray presented Wells with the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Recruiter of the Year Award.

But in searching Air Force Web sites, it's hard to verify much of that information. On or about Feb. 17, a number of Air Force

Recruiting Service sites that listed Wells among record-setters and Gold Medal winners were updated and his name was deleted.

The original versions of the Web pages, however, were still available through various Web archive utilities. □

Rod Hafemeister can be reached at (210) 658-6400 or rhafeme@2atpco.com.

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## Reports of rape prompt Air Force review at Sheppard

Base procedures,  
policies come under  
command scrutiny

By Nicole Gaudiano  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A team of Air Force officials is reviewing sexual-assault policies at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, after about two dozen women assigned there told counselors they were raped last year.

In fiscal 2003, between 20 and 25 women at Sheppard reported being raped, according to First Step, a local civilian rape crisis center. Most of the reported rapes occurred off base as the women were drinking and socializing with airmen, and several cases involved two or three men allegedly raping one woman, ac-

cording to the center's program director.

The review was announced Feb. 13, two days after Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, wrote to Air Force Secretary James Roche requesting that the Defense Department inspector general conduct a full investigation, "with emphasis on how commanders concluded each of these cases to the satisfaction of both the Air Force and the alleged victims."

"I feel the situation at Sheppard could rival that of the Air Force Academy — where the military's mishandling of sexual assault complaints was exposed last year," Hutchison wrote.

In the past 10 years, 45 Sheppard airmen faced courts-martial or received nonjudicial punishment for sexual assaults, said

Maj. Manning Brown, a spokesman for the 82nd Training Wing. Three of those airmen were acquitted.

Brown was not certain how many victims those cases involved or how many assaults occurred each year.

He also did not know how many of the women who turned to the crisis center last year went through their chain of command first.

He wasn't aware of how many of the convicted airmen were discharged from duty.

"Of course, it goes without saying that one is too many," he said. But, he added, "When you look at the number of students [assigned to Sheppard], the occurrence rate is very small."

On any given day, he said, there are about 6,100 students

assigned at Sheppard. About 1,000, or 16.5 percent, are women.

Col. K.C. McClain, Air Education and Training Command's deputy director of operations for technical training, is leading the team, which includes 22 people from bases within the command. Team members will interview the leadership of each training squadron along with several randomly chosen groups of students "to get a feel for the atmosphere across the squadron," said David Smith, AETC spokesman.

The panel will review policy along with previously reported assaults to determine whether proper actions were taken. Smith said the review is likely to take two or three weeks.

The review comes at a time when both Congress and the

Pentagon are examining how the military investigates sexual-assault complaints, following dozens of reports of sexual assault at the Air Force Academy that emerged last year.

The AETC panel will not be working with the Defense Department's Task Force on Care for Victims of Sexual Assault at this point, Smith said. The task force was formed to review how the department handles the treatment of victims, "with particular attention to the special issues in a combat theater" after reports of sexual assaults in Iraq.

Anyone with information about sexual assaults at Sheppard may call AETC's hot line at (888) 351-9477. □

The Associated Press contributed to this story.



# AETC Bases News Clips

## Altus AFB OK



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# Perseverance, prayer

## Chaplain shares lessons of Lincoln at Altus observance

BY MITCH MEADOR

STAFF WRITER

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**ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE —** The command chaplain for Air Education and Training Command focused on three characteristics that make this a great nation when he spoke Monday at Altus Air Force Base's 2004 National Prayer Luncheon.

Col. John W. Stefero concentrated on perseverance, service and prayer.

"When we think of perseverance, one person comes to mind immediately," he said.

Abraham Lincoln failed as a businessman and a farmer. He failed in his first attempt to obtain political office. He later had a nervous breakdown. Elected to the legislature, he failed when he sought the office of speaker. He also failed in his first attempt to serve in Congress and was defeated when he ran for the U.S. Senate. He failed when friends sought for him the nomination for vice president of the United States.

Before Lincoln's election to the presidency, when both men were practicing law, Edwin Stanton referred to Lincoln on at least one occasion as a "gorilla," and other associates were equally disappointed at his homely appearance, Stefero said.

Yet Lincoln never let such criticism alter his feelings about others. He came to respect Stanton for his mind and drew on him to serve as his Secretary of War. In the end, Lincoln's forbearance, patience and wisdom triumphed.

"When Lincoln was shot,

"God has placed a special responsibility on us. The most patriotic thing we can do is to humble ourselves and pray."

**COL. JOHN W. STEFERO**

CHAPLAIN, AIR EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMAND

Stanton looked down on the rugged face of the President and said through tears, "There lies the greatest ruler ... the world has ever seen," Stefero said.

"A second example of perseverance is that of Bob Wieland. In 1986, Bob Wieland competed in the New York Marathon with almost 20,000 other runners and finished dead last. The winner completed the race in just over two hours while Bob finished it in four days, two hours, 48 minutes and 17 seconds.

"What made this so remarkable? Bob Wieland ran with his arms. Seventeen years earlier while serving in Vietnam, Bob's legs were blown off in battle. So, when Bob competed, he sat on a 15-pound saddle, covered his fists with pads and ran with his arms.

"He, too, is the symbol of perseverance," Stefero said.

Concerning service, the chaplain quoted from Mark 10:43 ("Whoever wants to be great



among you must be your servant").

"We must stand as an example for that which is good and lasting and of worth to the community in which we live, the military in which we serve and the civic organizations where we hold membership," he said.

He recalled Congresswoman Claire Booth Luce's words to President John F. Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis: "A great man is one sentence. History doesn't have time for more than one sentence. You don't even have to mention the person's name. I'll give you an example: 'He died on a cross to

### THE LAWTON CONSTITUTION

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save us.' Or, 'he set out on a passage to the Old World and found the New.'"

Some examples Stefero gave his listeners: "He was a good father," "she loved her church."

"Whatever it is, service to others is a foundation of our country and an essential ingredient of greatness," he said.

"Third, our nation's greatness rests on our dependence on God through prayer. Today, America is the only national superpower. We are only six percent of the world's population; yet we have 54 percent of the world's wealth. Our attendance rate at churches, synagogues and mosques is 43 percent and is better than that of any other industrialized nation.

"America has been blessed because she has been especially useful for God's purposes in trying to heal a hurting, sin-marred world," Stefero said.

The speaker recalled a period when Israel was the unchallenged superpower of the Middle East, and King David was preparing to hand his crown over to his son, Solomon. At a national convocation, King David delivered a prayer that ascribed to God all glory, power and majesty. "Who are we that we dare to give to you, O Lord, because even what we give to you is something we received from you in the first place," King David is reported to have prayed.

"In order to keep our country great, it all depends on you and me. God has placed a special responsibility on us. The most patriotic thing we can do is to humble ourselves and pray," Stefero said.

At the conclusion of his talk, 97th Military Airlift Wing commander Col. Mark Solo presented Stefero with a framed lithograph of the C-45 at Altus AFB. Music in tripartite harmony was provided by the group Heart-song.